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## **Soo-im Kim and Female Sexuality in the Construction of National Identity: Re-inviting the Female Communist Spy into the Nation**

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### **Abstract:**

*The representation of Soo-im Kim, a famous communist spy in South Korea, has varied from femme fatale to a victim of ideological standoff between North and South Korea. However, there are few studies which deal with the gender issues concerning the change in representations of Soo-im Kim. This paper compares the literary work *The Spy Who Confessed and Soo-im Kim* (1982) with the more recent novel *Love Shot Her* (2002), to discuss the development of representations of her and its limit from the perspective of feminism.*

*First, the South Korean stigmatization of Soo-im Kim as a communist spy stemmed from the necessity of an anticommunist national identity in the 1980s, and the recent work discloses the nation's intentional stigmatization of Kim. In the process of stigmatizing, *The Spy Who Confessed and Soo-im Kim* describes Soo-im Kim as a representative victim of communist coax to convert. However, portraying her as the symbolic victim conceals the exclusion of female spies from the nation in the process of building its identity. In contrast, *Love Shot Her* restores Soo-im Kim's voice which protests that the nation sacrificed her for its political interest.*

*Further, the paper will also identify the male-centrism combined with the anticommunist national identity in both texts. *The Spy Who Confessed and Soo-im Kim* emphasizes Soo-im Kim's westernization and deviant sexuality, which are New Woman's characteristics. The execution of Soo-im Kim evinces South Korean men's fear of New Woman and the colonized inferiority complex towards America, which results in policing female sexuality to strengthen traditional South Korean patriarchy. This policing located sexually liberal women in the periphery. On the contrary, *Love Shot Her* approaches Soo-im Kim from a different angle in order to include her in South Korean society; it highlights the emotional side of her love and the coexistence between her western and Korean aspects.*

*However, *Love Shot Her* reiterates patriarchal gender roles. The intention of this work to reassess Soo-im Kim unexpectedly accentuates her virtues which her contemporary society enforced such as childlike innocence. While the author's strategy seems reasonable given that she is Soo-im Kim's peer, it can seem contentious in readers' eyes after 2002, when feminist movements rose in prominence.*

**Keywords:** *Soo-im Kim, Female Spy, Anticommunism, National Identity, Female Sexuality*

### **1. Introduction**

On 14<sup>th</sup> June 1950, eleven days before the outbreak of the Korean War due to the invasion of North Korea, the South Korean media paid sharp attention to one woman in court-martial. This woman was Soo-im Kim, arguably, the most famous communist spy in South Korea's history. She was convicted and sentenced to death for the acts of espionage which she committed against a colonel of U.S. Army, her husband, and it was on behalf of a top communist leader in North Korea, her secret lover. The exceptional facts around her case different from cases of other communist spies such as her beauty, elite education, connection to Americans and upper-class life averted public eye from whether she was really guilty or not. The media turned the case more sensational. According to K. Jeon (2012), "*The Dong-A Ilbo* (1950, June 16) emphasized Kim's beauty when it denounced her; *The Kyunghyang Shinmun* (1950, June 16 and 17) also concentrated on her luxurious life and her love affair between two men, rather than covering the trial itself" (as cited in p.110). Since then, Kim's story has unremittingly given birth to news articles, literary works, films and television series even into present day. Her story has been retold in the films *I Have Been Cheated* (1964), *Special Investigation Headquarter: A Life of Miss Kim Su-Im* (1974), a television series "Soo-im Kim, a Female Spy", the 12<sup>th</sup> episode from television drama, *First Republic of South Korea* (1981), a nonfiction essay entitled *The Spy Who Confessed and Soo-im Kim* (1982), a theatrical play *Me, Soo-im Kim* (1997), a literary work *Love Shot Her* (2002), and *Seoul 1945* (2006), a television series. All of these works but the latest two have solidified

Kim's image as a femme fatale communist spy who was so blinded by her love for Gang-kook Lee, her communist lover that she decided to use her beauty against her husband Baird, in order to pass his military secrets to Lee, not concerned with whether she was really guilty.

Some scholars now provide a fairer view on Kim by positing that postwar nationalism was problematic in that it established national identity by excluding Kim as an alleged communist—and disregarding her real political beliefs. As the Cold War came to an end in 1990 and the South Korean government adopted a more amicable attitude towards North Korea, a new approach to her story began to emerge in this contemporary context. They rethink her as a scapegoat of ideological conflict, not as communist femme fatale. For example, K. Jeon points out that “yellow journalism,” which refers to the journalism that depends on obscene hyperbole and sensationalism to draw readers' attention, intentionally misrepresented Kim; thus it diverted attention away from whether she *really* betrayed her country (p. 110). Nevertheless, few of the studies lay equal weight on the fact that she was marginalized as a woman. Only Jun's study (2014) delves into the intertwinement between the misrepresentation of communist spies and of women. Analyzing South Korean anticommunist films in the 1970s, she claims that the image of “female bodies on display in screens” (p. 168) belies whether these women were really communists, and eventually drove audiences to consume female communist spies as a sexual image. Moreover, despite the recent changes of the representation of Kim, there has rarely been any academic research on it. Therefore, examining recent reconstructions of her counters the distorted images and enlightens people as to the misrepresentation of women for establishing national identity.

This paper aims to focus more on issues associated with Kim's gender that were ignored in the origins of the Kim's image in the context of post-war nationalism as well as the stigma surrounding her identity as a spy. Considering that male and female spies are portrayed differently in the media, an examination of the influences of nationalism in relation to gender issues could yield new perspectives on the issue. This paper will investigate the process of making Kim a secret agent and how the history of the representation of her has progressed. Then this paper will discuss how media representations sometimes overstress her female sexuality and sometimes neglect it. Finally, this paper will explore the relationship between the fears surrounding the emergence of the New Woman in a patriarchal South Korean society, and the limitations of more recent representations which intend to improve Kim's image. In doing so, this study will compare the portrayal of Kim in two works, *Love Shot Her* (2002), written by S. Jeon, and *The Spy Who Confessed and Soo-im Kim* (hereinafter *The Spy*), an anticommunist literary work written by the Research Institute of Matters of Communist Bloc in 1982. The de-escalation of the North and South Korea after the end of the Cold War gave birth to *Love Shot Her* which tries to convince readers and the audience to separate themselves from the widespread negative representations of Kim. While other works of similar views cover all of South Korean society, the novel narrows down its focus to Kim's case, which is more appropriate for our study. On the other hand, 1982 was the last peak of national propagation of anticommunism in South Korea, so *The Spy* wraps up the tropes which had fabricated Kim's image of iconic communist spy. Thus, this paper uses *The Spy* as the criterion to discuss the development of the representation of Kim.

## 2. The Necessary Other: Female Communist Spies Role in National Identity Building

Feminist theorists take a particular interest in the image of female communists and this is based on the observation that nations seem to place some people outside of their boundaries by stipulating their unfavorable political allegiances. Butler and Spivak (2007) cogently argue in the book *Who Sings the Nation State?* that “. . . the creation of the exterior is necessary for the production of the nation, and this is actualized through the nation's designation of the modes of national belonging, which are thoroughly stipulative and criterial” (p. 31). This operation is problematic because while these outcasts are dispossessed of rights, they are still within a realm of power of the nation; they are exposed to the violence of the nation without any protection. Butler and Spivak take an example of immigrant workers in the U.S. For national homogeneity, the country tracks immigrant workers down and expels them to an area where its power incapacitates their legal rights, such as prison. If we situate their discussion in the world of the Cold War era, the standard of national belonging at that time was equivalent to whether he or she was a communist or not.

Since the Korean War provoked by ideological conflict, South Korea has erected an even stronger division between the nation-state and those on the outside for its national identity. The contrast made between South Korean as opposed to the outside this boundary was an artificial construction created to heighten internal cohesion. This artificial space raises the necessity of reconsidering a Korean term, *Pal-gaeng-yi*, which is a Korean slang similar to ‘Commie’ that disparages communists. Kang (2013), whose study focuses on culture during the Cold War, contextualizes *Pal-gaeng-yi* as, “. . . the term is used by President Syngman Rhee and his followers to categorize political opponents as threats to national security” (p. 236). The term in their usage expands its primary definition to an open signifier that can signify anything as a national enemy, in order to justify the regime and constitute an anticommunist national identity. Governments after President Rhee continued calling out *Pal-gaeng-yi* and driving them out of mainstream South Korea as the country continued to proclaim its homogeneous national identity.

It goes without saying that labeling Kim as a communist spy was also part of the process of shaping the anticommunist national identity. It was right before the Korean War when Kim was arrested for espionage. The conflict between the North and the South over the establishment of a sovereign government after the end of World War II had become heated, so the ruling party of South Korea needed to solidify their anticommunist identity against the North. This political interest could have influenced the verdict of Kim's case. In the end, South Korea banished Kim in order to support the formation of anticommunist nation, by transforming her into a seductress spy. Since the spy especially symbolizes a threat that originated from the outside but was able to infiltrate the internal workings of the nation, labeling Kim as a communist spy contributes significantly to the unity and the formation of the identity of the inside by raising the alarm that the danger of the outside is more urgent than we may have been aware of.

*The Spy* was the epitome of literary work that began constructing Kim into such a threat. When the book was published in 1982 there

was still a necessity for an anticommunist national identity. Its Preface says that the book intends to warn the danger of the threat of communism so that people from all ranks and classes could be on alert, and also, to edify the youth. The book conforms to its purpose and effectively persuades the reader of her guilt by listing the chronology of her espionage before her story begins such as her concealment of Lee in 1946 (p. 166) and provision of jeeps for fleeing communists in 1948 (p. 168). This list seems like an irrefutable historical record. At the same time, the book keeps asserting that Kim did not intend to work for the communists. It firstly accentuates Kim's naive and cheerful personality and ignorance in politics, rather than describing her as an evil witch. She did not know that Lee was a fervent supporter of communism (p. 191) and was never interested in political conflict between the Left and the Right (p. 195). *The Spy* secondly presents Kim's youth with an image of poverty and misfortune such as "A daughter from poor family, an orphan, unfortunate daughter-in-law-to-be. . ." (pp. 197-98). Her underprivileged youth drove her to be attracted to Lee and Baird— both men of high rank— so that she could improve her life. These descriptions mold her image as a girl who struggled to rise to rank, the type of person readers could easily find amongst their own neighbors. Relating Kim to a common person amplifies the dangers surrounding the temptation of communism, and thus warns readers that, even an ordinary person ignorant to politics like her can conduct espionage, regardless of their intention. She seems to band South Koreans together against communist threat; nevertheless, as long as the book does not acquit her of espionage, she cannot but stay on the outside of the nation. In other words, the book erases the public's disapproval of Kim for treason and reconstructs Kim from selected memories as a representative victim of cunning communists. It eventually veils her necessary guilt in the construction of national identity behind the heinousness of communism. She is called upon to unify the nation, but still, she ends up the Other, who is coerced into silence.

*Love Shot Her* breaks this silence and uncovers the possibility that her verdict is the result of her being exploited in the formation of anticommunist national identity. The author claims in Preface that:

A half century passed [since the Korean War], North Korea is inclined to accept an open-door policy, and the relations between North and South proceeds towards reconciliation . . . If Kim's case were tried in contemporary court, she might not be sentenced to death and Lee might come back to the South. (pp. 7-8)

S. Jeon (hereinafter Jeon) states that the outcome of Kim's case depended upon certain circumstances, and implies the possibility that existing representations of Kim could be manipulated depending on the needs of the times. In other words, national benefit necessitated the propagation of anti-communism. Compared to other works whose approach to Kim is similar, Jeon's provides a more compelling and vivid description of Kim, because it novelizes Kim's life and case from the author's own memory of being Kim's junior in university.

The novel especially restores Kim's protest to the charge of treason which are enumerated through her acts of espionage in *The Spy*. The information she divulges to Lee about the U.S. Army's withdrawal was top secret in *The Spy*, but in Jeon's work, Kim rebuts that newspapers had already printed it (p. 246). Furthermore, the work claims that the interrogation and trial was unjust. The prosecutor during the interrogation dismisses Kim's explanation, interprets Kim's paltry connection to communist figures as proof of her treason, and translates Kim's financial aid to her communist stepbrother as her loyalty to the party. Kim protests against the prosecutor, arguing, "you distort whatever I said," which shows his disinterest in whether or not she really conducted acts of espionage (p. 247). The prosecutor even reveals that he detained Kim without an arrest warrant or evidence, and only procures the evidence after deceiving Kim. This description shows that Kim *needed* to be convicted of being a *Pal-gaeng-yi*, regardless of the truth. Kim raved when her sentence of death, was announced asking that:

Which one is more important, a man or an idea? [ . . . ] Do ideologies have anything to do with people's lives? You promised my release when I provide you with evidence. . . . I could not die on a false accusation! (p. 259)

This reprimands the complicity of the nation with the prosecutor based on political interest. Ernest Renan argues that "forgetting. . . is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation" (as cited in Loomba, 1998, p. 196). Jeon's novel restores Kim's voice and thus reminds readers of the forgotten fact that some people were made to be a *Pal-gaeng-yi* for the construction of national identity. She reveals a crack in the historical record.

### 3. The "New Woman" in Controversy and the Male-centric National Identity

*Love Shot Her* brings Kim's voice into focus and accompanies a reassessment of her constant image as a femme fatale. Anticommunist works tend to personify communism's persuasive power as a female communist spy with sinister beauty and sexuality, unlike the case of male spies. The male-centrism in combination with anticommunist national identity represents the female sexuality as what must be punished for the sake of national identity, Gendering the communist spy magnifies the danger of woman's sexual temptation, because the temptation also embodies an ideological one. The female communist spy's temptation debilitates not only a target's masculinity, but also his national identity by indoctrinating him with communist ideas. M. Kwon (2005), a scholar of Korean literature mainly dealing with fascism, the Korean War and women, clarifies the male-centered national identity lying at the bottom of this idea as follows:

The spy discourse appropriates femininity because a spy's infinite, vague and imprecise proliferation of boundaries and infiltration resembles femininity (especially the connotation of female body) . . . The concept of societal contamination by female spy leads to the emphasis of masculinity which establishes robust society. (pp. 218-20)

In order for a nation to protect its identity, it requires the policing of female sexuality. When the female sexuality is judged to be an excessive threat to the national identity, the nation punishes it. As a result, female communist spies symbolize an abstract threat from outside and arouse insiders' fear of social destruction, regardless of whether they actually played significant role or employed sexual temptation for their espionage.

Men's fear of New Woman underlies feminizing communist temptation that can threaten the establishment of a male postcolonial

South Korea. The term 'New Woman' refers to women in 1950s who were westernized, and worked outside the home and enjoyed sexual freedom. The westernization and modernization of South Korean society triggered by U.S. domination after the independence from Japan gave birth to the term. However, J. Jung (2009) demonstrates that South Korea in the 1950s negatively re-contextualized the New Woman as being captivated by American consumerism and as being sexually transgressive, while acknowledging men's modernization (p. 122). The nation's differing response to men and women's modernization illustrates the dilemma of postcolonial countries; according to Chatterjee (1993), postcolonial countries need to "... fashion a modern national culture that is nevertheless not Western" (p. 6). He suggests the solution to the dilemma to divide the world into a material—outside sphere of the economy, statecraft, science and technology—and a spiritual—inner domain of culture which includes religion, customs and the family; man belongs to the former and woman to the latter (p. 6). Anticolonial nationalist idea in this way locates woman as the essence of the nation which needs to be protected from the colony's influence, in order to preserve national identity. This idea led South Korean society to relate New Woman to the result of colonialist intrusion, and to disapprove of their sexuality and western influence. Two examples of these types of women are signified by the terms *Yangongju* and *Madame UN*, which connote prostitutes catering to American soldiers. South Korean society regarded having sexual relationship with Americans as the subjugation to vanity, consumerism and sexual indulgence which they define as Western traits contrary to Korean virtues. Thus, the society condemned *Yangongju* and *Madame UN* for damaging the national value of chastity. In this fashion, the nation policed female sexuality; it needed to be repressed by the nation if it reached the point of being so excessive that it threatened the national identity. The nation accorded this image of New Woman to the female communist spy, both of whom must be subjugated for its security.

From this viewpoint, the description of Kim's espionage in *The Spy* is contentious in that it repeats and reproduces the typical image of the female spy with excessive sexuality. It is noticeable that the book highlights two instances of sexual intercourse which Kim had with Lee and Baird. It is during these scenes that she conducts her espionage. The scene where Kim hides Lee as he is fleeing from the South Korean military police is followed by their sexual relationship (p. 195). Here, Lee's assertion of establishing one unitary communist government and Kim's silence to it occurs at the peak of their passion. This makes an impression that she is blinded by her sexuality and finally overlooks Lee's treason which is a fatal threat to national identity.

The link between Kim's espionage and her sexuality is more obvious in her sexual relationship with Baird. It is while they are in the act of intercourse that Baird tells Kim that the U.S. army would withdraw from South Korea that summer, a piece of information, the communist party in South Korea ordered her to get. The book even describes their sexual act as "more intense, sensual and perverted than anytime" (p. 232). This eerie description reflects men's erotic and grotesque fantasy, and further sexually objectifies the communist spy. It exemplifies Theweleit (1987)'s "fantasized proletarian woman" (p. 70). Theweleit structures the process of gendering Nazi soldiers' fear of communism in the following way: "Erotic male-female relationship—violent, unfeeling woman—threat to the man—dirt, vulgarity—prostitution—proletarian woman—communism" (p. 70). He indicates that in this process, women's image often appears in association with the uncanny, which is hardly derived from their actual behavior (p. 67); it is merely male soldiers' construction of a fantastic being. As far as the naming of such beings, it remains of great significance for them, and they do not make any attempt to trace back what poses the threat. Feminists tend to discover witch-hunters in Theweleit's men, for whom female sexuality and power is evil incarnate (p. xiv). Nazis' feminization of the communist threat repeats in the stigma of *Pal-gaeng-yi*. Kim's perversion visualizes the ideological threat to the establishment of national identity, and warns readers at that time of the danger of excessive female sexuality.

*The Spy* asserts that Kim's sexuality is more alarming to national identity by spotlighting the involvement of her sexuality with an American man. The book attributes Kim's sexual indulgence to her exposure to western influence and cements her image of a westernized woman, who endangers national identity and is punished in the end. Her sexuality could be more shocking and unforgivable because it is an American man whom she has sex with. As far as "woman" signifies pristine national identity, men from the colony accept women who have been penetrated by colonizers as the symbol of national impotence, deprived of sovereignty. Thus, these women must be excluded from national identity and silenced during its establishment. Besides, *The Spy* also underscores that Kim's love shifted from Lee to Baird after she gave birth to Baird's son (p. 216). This positions Kim as *Yangongju* who bore a son to the American soldier and enjoyed wealth at the cost of national purity. N. Lee (2008) points out that half-blood children between *Yangongju* and American soldiers, the product of careless sex, were considered to be the contamination of ethnic purity and thus, *Yangongju* came to represent national shame (p. 94). Since both of New Woman and female communist spy destroy male-centered national identity, they are described as too much westernized, extravagant, and promiscuous. *The Spy* shows the model representation of these women through Kim and finally marginalizes her from the nation.

On the contrary, *Love Shot Her* eschews describing Kim's overwhelming sexuality and emphasizes Kim's pure and loyal love for Lee. Jeon diverges most from *The Spy* in that she tones down the physical side of their love and instead focuses on the emotional side. Kim and Lee continually sympathize with each other, especially through a shared sense of loneliness. Jeon describes that since Kim's youth was lonely and full of adversities, she always longs for people and family, which drives her towards her intense love with Lee who is as lonely as she is. Whenever she meets him, she sympathizes with him and always tells about her dream of having a big family. These scenes persuade readers that their love is genuine. Jeon also appeals that Kim's love for Lee does not change even after getting married to Baird and lasts until she dies (p. 143). Their pure love reveals the author's intention to remove the stain which was put on Kim by previous representations of her being sexually corrupted between two men. The author's omission of Kim and Baird's half-blooded son, who was considered as symbol of the contamination of the nation's pure blood, also mitigates the danger which her marriage to an American man poses.

In addition, Jeon argues that Kim did not abandon Korean virtues and rather reconciled it with the Western influence on her life. The author emphasizes that Kim's marriage to Baird does not endanger the purity of her Korean identity. In Jeon's work, Baird respects

Korean culture so much that it is as if he has been Koreanized. When he invites Kim and Youn-sook Moh to supper, Western and Korean culture seem to coexist perfectly. He prepares Korean cuisine for the ladies with Western drinks, and praises *Kimchi* (p. 130). They also dance to both *Arirang* and *La Traviata* and feel that “the barrier between them disappears” (p. 132). The relationship between Kim and Baird signifies the harmonization of both cultures without stratification. During their matrimony, Jeon underscores that, “It is not Soo-im who is Westernized, but Baird who became Koreanized. He tried to help and to be on South Korea’s side as much as he could” (p. 142). The marriage to the American soldier brought no harm to Kim’s identity as a Korean.

The integration of Kim’s Korean cultural identity and western influence reaches its zenith in the final scene where she is executed. She wears a white *hanbok*, a traditional Korean dress made from ramie fabric, at her own request. A woman in *hanbok* is the emblem of the Korean people, according to H. Kwon (2009), who chiefly examines the relationship between nationalism and feminism (p. 130). In line with Chatterjee’s idea discussed earlier, Kwon pinpoints that a woman in *hanbok* symbolizes the essence of Korean culture, one which colonizers cannot tarnish (p. 129). Jeon, in this respect, invites Kim inside South Korea as a woman who can still wear a *hanbok* and represent the purity of South Korea despite her Western education. A Christian hymn plays in the background before her death. This implies Kim’s association with western comforts in unity with Korean tradition, symbolized by the white *hanbok* (p. 278). Through the coexistence of Korean and western culture within Kim, Jeon claims Kim’s innocuousness to the integrity of South Korean identity despite the western influence over her life; she strays from the New Woman who is corrupted morally and sexually beyond the bounds of societal standards.

#### 4. The Limit of Re-Representation of Kim in *Love Shot Her*

*Love Shot Her* shuns the overemphasis of Kim’s sexuality on which the national oppression and exclusion of her was based. Yet, it produced the side effect that the description of her in the novel complies with the ideal modern woman, which is another way of policing female sexuality besides the concept of New Woman. During the trusteeship rule of the U.S. Military government from 1945 to 48, the concept of the modernized woman was ambiguous because it was neither totally westernized like New Woman, nor was it completely pre-modern. This ambiguity has been diagnosed by scholars as part of the dilemma of postcolonial countries which Chatterjee posed above. As long as a woman emblemizes national culture according to the formula of the outer and inner realm discussed earlier, the dilemma will lead towards forming the image of a modern woman who does not discard traditional values. Loomba (1998) states that nationalists responded to colonizers’ efforts to reform women by initiating their own reformation of women, claiming that only they had the right to intervene in such matters (p. 192). It attests to the significance of women as the symbol of the national essence. These tactics, however, resulted in partial reform and sometimes even strengthened indigenous patriarchal practices (Loomba, p. 192). This mechanism applies to the situation of South Korea; N. Lee describes, the concept of the modernized woman defined by the South Korean society in the 1950s as one “. . . who internalizes civilized consciousness and behavior, and simultaneously is the epitome of gentle beauty, virtue, diligence and humility” (p. 94).

Both the ideal modern lady and New Woman are two sides of the same coin of female exclusion by androcentric nationalists. The concept of ideal modern women cements the distinction between the lady who still cherishes traditional values and New Woman who subjugates herself to western ideas. Punishing a woman who violates traditional womanly virtues engenders outcasts such as *Yangongju* and eventually reiterates male-centric gender roles, as Loomba points out (p. 192). At the same time, however, the ideal modern woman is also marginalized by the nation as a whole in that it takes advantage of her as the marker of its essence but actually oppresses them under the name of patriarchy. While the concept of the ideal modern woman seems to allow women access to education and to work outside of the home—two opportunities which they would be deprived of in a traditional society—it also masks the reiteration of patriarchy and positioning women as outsiders. The marginality of women in the end contributes to the construction of postcolonial nations’ identity against the colonial domination. Still, they cannot be included in the nation themselves.

Appealing to the male fear of the New Woman, Kim in *Love Shot Her* does not transgress the social standard. While Kim is a working woman with good social skills and refined taste that are based on western education, she is humble and innocent. Though she is wealthy, she is also easily moved by simple things, and values people’s sincerity rather than material goods. Jeon defends Kim’s marriage to Baird throughout the work by positing that Kim accepted his proposal because of his humanity and sincere love, not because of her lust or his fortunes. Kim’s rebuttal of the prosecutor’s maligning of her in the trial elucidates the writer’s aim to clear Kim’s name:

Prosecutor: This is the evidence of the defendant’s lavish lifestyle with imported goods when everyone else is tightening their belt to establish a new country. You confessed that you milked Colonel Baird dry for your luxurious life and for espionage on behalf of North Korea, didn’t you?

Kim: That is not true. (p. 255)

The prosecutor’s accusation of Kim, which is close to slander, recalls the description of *Yangongju* or *Madame UN*. In fact, he repeatedly establishes an evaluation of Kim as someone who enjoys a privileged lifestyle thanks to her relationship with the Americans. Therefore, Kim’s disavowal of the prosecutor’s slander demonstrates her act of resistance to the bad name given to her by male-centered anticommunism.

However, Jeon’s defense of Kim accompanies the restatement of traditional female virtue which patriarchal nationhood propagates. Kim internalizes the Confucian idea of the marriage and home in spite of her modernized exterior. Her dream is “to marry a cultured doctor who is versed in art and literature and to be respected as the lady of the peaceful home” (p. 68). Furthermore, her beauty, childlike innocence and humility, all of which are requirements for ladies in a patriarchal society, are highlighted throughout the work. Expressions such as “. . . cute like naive girl. . .” (p. 22) “You are exactly like a child. . .” (p. 102) “As if she were a happy child. . .” (p. 106) “. . . innocent and simple. . .” (p. 141) “. . . skillful in tidying. . .” (p. 145) and “Her face is tender and cute like that of a

child. . . ” (p. 183) follow Kim to the end of the book. Although New Woman had shed itself of these virtues, which were pivotal to Korean tradition and culture, according to Jeon, Kim definitely does not.

In the novel, the controversy surrounding the modern woman who accepts traditional gender roles is especially obvious in *The Nang Nang Club* to which Kim belonged. Jeon introduces it as a social club consisting only of elite women from high rank, which has purpose of performing informal diplomacy especially with the U.S. Army (p. 117). In addition to services related to international politics which are conducted in the national interest, Jeon describes the club’s fundraising for charity, and the pride which the members take in their work. The author provides a chance to imagine the club as a site where educated women can work for the nation outside of the home, illustrating the advancement in women’s status. Yet, the connotation of the phrase “informal diplomacy” perhaps must be regarded with more scrutiny, beyond the author’s simple explanation that the club’s mission was hosting parties and drawing concern and favor for South Korea from American officers. Women called out for ‘socializing’ with soldiers brings to mind the traditional role of women in the army, that is, sexually comforting soldiers. I. Lee (2004) sees this as one of the president Rhee’s typical diplomatic strategy. She criticizes him as follows:

President Rhee’s typical diplomacy contained parties intertwined with sexuality, beautiful girls who serve in *hanbok*, along with their singing and dancing. *The Nang Nang Club* illustrates best one of President Rhee’s tactful methods of diplomacy founded on women’s traditional gender role. It is thus ironic that female leaders actively participated in it. (p. 116)

The public opinion of the club at that time supports I. Lee’s argument in that it was viewed as no more than a luxurious place for *Yangongju* or prostitutes (p. 117). The author concludes that the club does not escape the traditional female role: comforting male soldiers with their sexuality. Thus, it can be said that Jeon’s praise of Kim as a member of the club does little more than subordinates her to a male-centric gender role, and not the contrary.

In fact, Jeon’s intention seems to take the negative stigma off of Kim through emphasizing that she was modernized, but only to the extent that the society permitted. Furthermore, since the society itself is patriarchal, Jeon’s representation of Kim as a modernized woman does not violate the dichotomy of gender roles, but rather complies with and reproduces the traditional idea of woman. Loomba points out that nationalism selects and propagates only specific traditions from amongst multiple histories which could be significant even today; the problem is that this process of devising of a tradition is done through interpellation and exclusion of women (p. 196). In this way, Kim’s modernization is simultaneously the symbol of national development and a threat to the construction of national identity. In both cases, women cannot be included in the realm of the nation. Though Jeon represents Kim as the image of the ideal South Korean woman, she cannot belong to the nation as long as she is a woman. This representation might be understandable if we consider that the author is a contemporary of Kim and was inculcated with the patriarchal concept of the ideal modern lady. Nevertheless, it may have seemed anachronistic and highly disputable to contemporary feminists who read the work in 2002, after the establishment of the Ministry of Gender Equality in 2001, and after the success of feminist movements, such those that seek the prohibition on sex trafficking in South Korea (Korean Women’s Studies Institute, 2005, p. 296). Therefore, the ignorance of *Love Shot Her* to this fact makes its re-representation of Kim questionable.

## 5. Conclusion

As rigidity of the relation between North and South Korea has thawed concomitantly, so has the representation of communist spies. Yet those of female spies require more careful inspection because they are more prone to the distortion in male-centric society. Overemphasis of their sexuality degrades their story into entertainment and diverts the audience’s attention away from the real scenario: that the nation sacrificed them in order to unite its people against a common ideological enemy. Moreover, South Korea punishes female communist spies for transgressive sexuality and moves to develop its identity on the ground of male-centrism. Soo-im Kim is the iconic example of this marginalization and degradation.

Given that Kim’s case is the quintessential story of a female communist spy, it is necessary to observe the change in the representation of her throughout history, in order to unravel the disharmony which exists between nationalism and gender issues. Since the female communist spy is the subaltern of South Korea whose identity can only be spoken for indirectly, through anticommunist and male voices, it is hard to reconstruct what Kim’s voice would actually sound like, and how she would actually express herself. Nevertheless, a lull in animosity between the two Koreas provided *Love Shot Her* a chance to speak for Kim more successfully, compared to *The Spy*, though the success is not without its limitations. In fact, the latter seems to slightly escape from the traditional description of Kim as a communist femme fatale by suggesting her unfortunate youth and ignorance about the conflict between ideologies. Nevertheless, as long as it convinces the audience that she is guilty based on an objective historical record, the untraditional representations that the book presents of her are only setting her up to become the national victim of communist temptation. In this way, the author is able to conceal the nation’s exploitation of her, and her existence is only meaningful as it serves the role of the Other for the nation.

On the contrary, *Love Shot Her* challenges the representation of Kim in *The Spy*, though with concomitant limitation. The novel restores Kim’s protest which was muted by the nation and questions the historical record. Furthermore, it emphasizes the platonic side of Kim’s love and claims that she was the ideal modernized lady. Its representation nullifies that of *The Spy* which repeats the stereotype of a female spy whose threatening sexuality and excessive westernization leads to the policing and exclusions of female sexuality from the nation. However, Jeon’s intention to clear Kim’s name through a representation of her which fits the model of the modernized lady eventually reiterates the patriarchal gender role, because the model itself is male-centric construction. Through the production of “woman” who obeys traditional gender roles as the national symbol, the nation both marginalizes the lady and *Yangongju*. Thus, by describing Kim as adhering to this model, Jeon overlooks that women have been excluded from the invention of the nation and thus can never be its member.

Nevertheless, Jeon's work is still significant in that it sheds light on Kim's voice as an individual, which was effaced under the macro discourse of nationalism. This individual voice is reflected in the book as Kim cries out that "Which one is more important, a man or an idea? . . . Do ideologies have anything to do with people's lives?" (259). Considering that the author's age is nearly 80, Jeon's memories may be unreliable, but it is also undeniable that among numerous works about Kim, *Love Shot Her* differs in that it tries to represent Kim as a victim of ideological confrontation, not as a threatening culprit, or enemy of the nation. Kim is the apparent victim of a form of representation that varies according to political interests. This is demonstrated in the changes which occurred to the representation of her—based mainly on inadequate information—throughout South Korean history. The transformation took almost 50 years; as Kim first took form in the media as the femme fatale who endangered national security, and eventually became an ordinary woman who was sacrificed in the name of nationalism for the man she loved. However, such a contrasting representation of the same figure, going from one extreme to another, still begs the question of who this woman really is. Of course, representation cannot restore the reality. Nevertheless, it is still important to remove the ideological padding which hinders the public from figuring out the reality of Kim, and also, to monitor whether or not representations abandon individuals in the founding of the nation.

When the represented individual is a female, this sort of monitoring of representations is especially significant in discussions of feminism. Nationalism plays a large part in establishing a unique identity for the country it stands for. However, too often has it been used by a patriarchal society to oppress women through their (mis)representation. In this regard, the reinterpretation and reconstruction of Kim through media portrayal is meaningful when viewed from the perspective of feminism. When approached from such a perspective, it may become possible to alleviate the conflict which exists between feminism and nationalism. Examined historically, this study found that the current image of the female communist spy is far less biased than it was in the past, but nevertheless, there are still some limitations. However, if literary and media works about Kim's story continue to be produced, then perhaps there is a possibility for more impartial and insightful discussions about Soo-im Kim to occur. These discussions may help to establish a sensible viewpoint about representing not only women stigmatized as communist spies but also about women in general in Korea.

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## 7. Footnotes

1. The last name Lee in this paper only refers to Gang-kook Lee. In case of other writers who have the same surname, this paper will use first initials with the last names to prevent confusion.
2. The Tae-woo Roh administration announced The Unification Plan for One National Community in September 11, 1989, followed by the Young-sam Kim administration's Unification Formula for the Korean National Community in August 15, 1994. These proposals separate themselves from those made by former administrations, which were comparably less hostile towards North Korea administration (Ministry of Unification [MOU], 2005, pp. 14-16).
3. On 24<sup>th</sup> September 1980, the government of North Korea proclaimed indefinite delay of 11<sup>th</sup> meeting with South Korea, which hardened the relationship between them again (MOU, 1999, p. 117). The tension on the Korean peninsula was not defused until 1984 when sports officials from two Koreas resumed meetings. (p. 119). Afterwards, with the end of the Cold War and South Korea's dramatic political and economic development, the necessity of anti-communism ideology to tie the country together weakened.
4. The term *Pal-gaeng-yi* originated from a Korean word Pal-gat-ta, which means red. The term literally means a 'red chap.'
5. *The Spy Who Confessed and Soo-im Kim* is the 10<sup>th</sup> volume of *The Annals of Anticommunist* (1982). This book includes a communist spy's confession of how he surrendered to communists and of Il-sung Kim's ambition to set up single communist government in the Korean Peninsula.
6. On account of the American military government being the effective subject of power, the relationship between the U.S. and South Korea was that of the colonizer and the colonized. In *American Military Government in Korea* (1951), Meade who was a government officer in the province of Cholla Namdo demonstrates America's status of *de facto* colonizer. The contents of the book says the government wielded power comprehensively over establishing policies in fields ranging from foreign policy to public health and welfare. Meade also exposes the government's typical colonialist thought-process regarding what it viewed as an underdeveloped colony: "Because of an absence of any conception of cleanliness and sanitation, the Orient was ridden with exotic and terrible diseases. . . . There can be no dispute that sanitation in Korea fell far below American standards" (p. 219). All these acknowledge the neocolonial state of South Korea under the American Military Government.
7. *Yangongju* is the combination of the word 'Yang' which means 'western' and 'Gongju' meaning 'princess.' Together with Madame UN, the terms imply nuanced social satire and criticism about these women's attachment to American soldiers and their extravagant and sexually liberal lifestyle.